Naila Segule

Englishwoman-Jewish

January 28, 1912

Dear Safta,

I'm writing this letter from Philadelphia. I'm sorry I didn't tell you about leaving the village, but I couldn't handle it anymore. I can't believe I’ve made it all the way to America. I'd been worried about getting through Angel Island and surviving the voyage. After we got off the boat, there were some inspections, but luckily I made it through and O.K.ed for going to Philadelphia. The questions they asked were quite easy, such as, “What is your name?” and “Where did you live before?” Finally I got to go to Philadelpiha and like Tom and all his friends say America is the haven, I am so glad I left the village because Mameh and Tateh were trying to control my life too much. They were trying to force me to marry Samuel just because he comes from a wealthy family, Samuel was a pig, but I will always love you and miss you Safta.

Also, I want to learn more science and I think America is the place to do that. I remember the huge book of Saba’s that you gave me when I was fifteen and I knew I couldn’t leave them behind. I've read the science books from cover to cover and flipped through my favorite parts during my boat ride to America. Tom’s friends sometimes teach me more science facts, especially his friend Duncan who goes to the local college. Duncan is from a Jewish family that left Poland when he was just a kid; he comes to visit us a lot.

I've been working in a garment factory. I was a little apprehensive at first after what Tom had told me about the conditions in the factories, but I really needed the money. I don’t wish to live with Tom forever. It turns out in New York there was a fire in one of the factories which killed 146 garment workers. The doors to stairwells and exits had been locked, so a lot of people were unable to escape when the fire occurred. When I first started working at the factory I had nightmares about fires for a long time. During work, I hum the patriotic songs in Yiddish to calm me down. My favorite one is “Leben zol Amerika”. My supervisor at work is a boychick and tries to flirt with me, but I just ignore him and let him carry on since I don’t want to lose my job. He asked me once to work during Sabbath not even thinking of what a sin that would be. I don’t know where I would be without my faith Safta.

I hope to start learning more science real soon. I don’t expect to go to college, but like you said every day is a day to learn something new. I don’t speak to many people in America; mostly Tom’s friends and the girls at work. Members of the local synagogue do not socialize much~~.~~. It turns out a lot of Jews here are not from England. Most of them get confused by my Yiddish accent and I don’t enjoy talking to them. The people aren’t always that nice, and I’ve never liked small talk that much so Tom and I usually leave synagogue right after the services. My new friend Josie has been giving me books that are bilingual in Yiddish and English. She works right next to me at the factory. She emigrated from Poland and is helping me learn English when the supervisors aren’t watching.

I’ve attached a picture of me that was taken after I got into Philadelphia. I am wearing one of the garments that I needed to take home to work on. I wanted to send it to you so you would know that I am doing well and to show you that now I feel like I have gotten a new start at life. That America has given me a second chance to be happy and that I am in my haven no matter what happens. I tried to contain my smile in my picture since Mameh never liked smiling in pictures, but the tips of my lips are turned up slightly.

Love,

Ruth



Hebrew Translations

Safta-grandma

Mameh-mom

Tateh-dad

Saba-grandpa

Sources:

Primary Account:

Clark, Francis E., Mrs. "Our Immigrants At Ellis Island." N.p., n.d. Web. 6 Sept. 2012. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/gdc/scd0001/2004/20040315002ou/20040315002ou.pdf>.

Online Encyclopedia:

"Encyclopedia Britannica Online." Encyclopedia Britannica Online. Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d. Web. 06 Sept. 2012. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/418612/North-America/41488/The-European-heritage>.

Online Journal:

"A Century of Immigration, 1820-1924." (n.d.): n. pag. A Century of Immigration, 1820-1924 (From Haven to Home: 350 Years OfJewish Life in America). The Library of Congress, 27 July 2010. Web. 06 Sept. 2012. <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/haventohome/haven-century.html>.

Picture:

"2.56 Russian Young Woman Braid Watchorn.jpg." Forgotten Ellis Island - Am I Your Relative? Forgotten Ellis Island, 2012. Web. 06 Sept. 2012.<http://forgottenellisisland.com/joomla1/index.php?Itemid=37>.